

THE MENACE OF FULANI HERDSMEN IN NIGERIA: A THREAT TO NATIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract

Nigeria has been witnessing series of security challenges such as communal riots, agitation for resource control and Boko Haram insurgency since the return of civil rule in 1999. These security challenges have resulted in massive loss of lives and properties. The attacks by the Fulani herdsmen have in recent years taken more dangerous dimension with acquisition modern weapons and communication devices. Incidents of killing, robbery, rape and kidnapping by the Fulani herdsmen have inflicted pain on most farmers thus creating serious security challenge. Therefore, the basic thrust of this paper is to examine the menace of Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria and identify its implication to national security. This study collected data from secondary sources like Journals, textbooks, newspapers etc. The data were analyzed with qualitative method. The frustration-aggression theory was adopted as a framework for analysis. The paper reveals that the attack by the Fulani herdsmen militates against food security, destruction of lives and properties and results in massive unemployment. This paper recommends that the government should encourage the wealthy owners of the cattle to set up cattle ranches in different parts of the country where the animals should be properly cared for. There is also a need for compulsory registration of Fulani herdsmen operating in any local government to enable the security agents and the host communities monitor their activities.

Keywords: Fulani Herdsmen, National Security, Challenge.

Introduction

The menace of Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria is becoming worrisome and thus poses a serious threat to national security. Apart from Boko Haram, one recurrent security challenge that confronts many states in the country is the challenge of Fulani herdsmen. The herdsmen attacks on the several communities in Nigeria have been on increase (Akevi, 2014). There have been escalations of reported attacks by Fulani herdsmen who brutally kill natives of the invaded farming communities including women and children in various states across the country (Duroyaiye, 2014). The worst affected states include: Benue, Nassarawa, Plateau, Taraba, Kaduna, Adamawa, Zamfara, Oyo, Imo, Cross River, Abia, Ebonyi and Rivers.

Fulani herdsmen normally attack their target communities at the time they are most susceptible such as mid-night or prayer days, when they are in their churches, incessantly killing people with sophisticated weapons, looting properties and burning houses (Durojaiye, 2014). The Global Terrorism Index (GTI) (2015, p. 43) reports

that Fulani herdsmen are believed to have killed at least 1, 229 people in Nigeria in 2014.

The combat readiness and sophistication gives them the courage not only to attack host communities but to confront and attack constituted authorities that are heavily protected with the state of art military convoys (Nte, 2016, p. 27). A scenario where the convoy of the governor of Benue State (Gabriel Suswan) was ambushed and attacked by these herdsmen elucidates the picture better (Nte, 2016).

Therefore, the primary objective of this paper is to examine the menace of Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria and determine its implication to national security. The paper also suggests appropriate strategies to reduce the incidence of Fulani herdsmen attacks in Nigeria. The study is based on qualitative analysis which relies on secondary data as its source of information. These include: books, newspapers, journals, among others. The paper is divided into six sections, section A deals with the introduction, section B focuses on conceptual clarification, section C is concerned with theoretical framework and D dwells on menace of Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria. Section E deals with the implication of Fulani herdsmen attacks for national security. Finally, section F focus on conclusion and recommendation.

Conceptual Clarification

Fulani Herdsmen

Fulani herdsmen or Fulani pastoralists are nomadic or semi nomadic herders whose primary occupation is raising livestock (Iro 1994). Fulani herdsmen engage in both random and planned transhumance movements. Random movements are usually taken by the pure nomadic Fulani herdsmen while planned movements are taken by the semi nomadic pastoralist. A primary reason for migratory nature of the herdsmen is to reach areas with abundant grass and water for the cattle (Iro 1994).

National Security

Two fundamental perspectives have emerged in an attempt to define national security. One perspective focuses on strategic definition and the other on non-strategic definition by laying emphasis on socio-economic factors (Eme & Okeke, 2008). The strategic perspective conceptualizes national security in terms of self-defence by amassing arms to deter aggression. In this context, Ate and Akinterewa (1992, p. 256) defined national security as “the defense and protection of the sovereignty of the country and of its territorial and political jurisdictions against external and indeed internal threats” similarly Imobigbe (1981) refers national security as defense and survival of the state.

The non-strategic definition lays emphasis on socio-economic factors. In the opinion of Rotin (cited in Iheanacho, 2012, p. 70) “it is not just the physical survival of (the people and their state) which is the issue but also the satisfaction of their needs for healthy clothing, education and shelter. In the same vein, Ate and Akinterewa (1992, p. 257) observed “the security of any nation lies not sorely or even primarily in its military capability: but equally in developing relatively stable patterns of

economic and political growth”.

Based on the above broader and holistic approach Nigeria’s national security can be defined in terms of defense of the country’s territorial integrity, elimination of threats to security including the menace of Fulani herdsmen, providing food and environmental security, promotion of peaceful coexistence in the country, bringing about sustainable socio-economic development and democratic development (Iheanacho, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

The frustration-aggression theory could be used to study the menace of Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria. This theory which was also known as frustration-aggression-displacement theory was developed by John Dollard and his associates in 1939 but expanded and modified by Yate in 1962 and Berkowitz in 1963, which draws mainly from psychological basis of motivation and behaviour (Ogege, 2015). The theoretical framework explains the violent behavioural pertains which is caused by the inability of individuals to fulfill human needs. According to the theorists, the main cause of human capacity for violence is frustration aggression mechanism. This means unfulfilled expectations create relative deprivation gap between expectation and capabilities and can lead to violence or conflict. In other words, when someone or group of people have the perception of their ability or right to something (goal), if prevented from attaining such goals the result is frustration which will in turn generate aggressive behaviour that will snowball to violence (Ojo, 2014).

Dollard et al (1939 as cited in van der Dennen, n.d) posited “that occurrence of aggressive behaviour always presupposes the existence of frustration and, contrariwise, that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression.” Frustration can be used to mean not only to the process of blocking one’s attainment of a reinforcer but also to the reaction to such blocking. Therefore, being frustrated implies a person’s access to reinforce is being thwarted by another party or by circumstance and that one’s reaction to this prevention or thwarting is one of annoyance (van der Dennen, n.d).

The application of this theory is that the increase in attacks of Fulani herdsmen is associated with frustration they experience as a result non-fulfillment of their needs. The herdsmen inability to have access to land for rearing of cattle (as result of restriction by local communities) has led to frustration on the side of herdsmen which made them to engaged in violent activities whenever they experience any restriction by local farmers and people communities in Nigeria. The herdsmen regard settled farmers as their potential enemies that militate against their survival and destiny, while the farmers see the herdsmen as intruders in their communities who are determined to destroy their farm products. The frustrated herders and farmers resort to violence, which leads to destruction of lives and properties, displacement of farmers and reduction in agricultural production. These problems pose serious threat to national security in Nigeria.

The Menace of Fulani Herdsmen in Nigeria

Historically, the menace of Fulani herdsmen show that the “phenomenon has progressively metamorphosed from rudimentary communal skirmishes to organized armed confrontation in its apparent dynamics of degeneration” (Chukwuma, 2016, p. 22). In its latest manifestation, the phenomenon depicts a genre of violence characterized by immense arms bearing and brutal sophistication (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). In almost every state in Nigeria, Fulani herdsmen graze where they like, destroy corps, block traffic, rape women, beat up hunters and occasionally unleash (wage) deadly attacks on villagers where there is slightest resistance to their depredations (Okeke, 2014, p. 73).

According to Bolarinwa (2012, p. 10) Nigeria has recorded several violent-conflicts in many rural communities since 1999 till 2012. Conflicts that have resulted in over 10, 000 deaths and the internal displacement of over 300, 000 Nigerians have been recorded.

From late 2012, the killing by the Fulani herdsmen in the Middle Belt began to take on a systematic and methodical pattern that increasingly looks like a deliberate plan to wipe out native ethnic groups either by killing or displacing them, in order to take control of lands and fields in the region. On March 28, 2015 the clashes between Fulani and Tarok in Plateu State resulted in deaths of 18 persons. Similarly, the clashes between Fulani herdsmen and natives in Bokkos areas of Bokko LGA in Plateau State led to the deaths of 18 persons.

The communal conflicts caused by Fulani herdsmen in Benue state had claimed the lives of more than 5000 victims in the first half in the year 2014. The victims include women and children and they sacked more than 100 communities and have thrown thousands of refugees into Internally Displaced Pergans (IDPS) camp located in Makurdi (Nte, 2016, p. 27). Earlier more than 200 people were killed by Fulani herdsmen in Shengev Community in Gwer West Local Government Council with strange substance that looks like bio-chemical weapons (Akevi, 2016).

The situation is not different in Taraba which has also witnessed series of attacks and killings by Fulani herdsmen. The southern senatorial zone of Taraba State has for some months now witnessed unprecedented and sudden influx of Fulani herdsmen and the relationship between the Fulani and Tiv in both Benue and Taraba States is increasingly becoming strained because of incessant attacks on the Tiv by the Fulani’s with very human casualties and loss of properties (Nte, 2016). The destruction of lives and properties had made the Tiv from Taraba State to abandon their homes and search for alternative safety places.

The communal conflicts orchestrated by Fulani herdsmen in Wukari have led to gruesome murder of dozens of people and wanton destruction of property. According to Agi (cited in Nte, 2016, p. 28) the “Red cross yesterday said in Wukari, Taraba State that about 77 people lost their lives during the crises between some Fulani herdsmen and the indigenous people of the area few days ago”. More than 40 people were being treated “for various degrees of injuries sustained because of the attacks by Fulani herdsmen”. In Zamfara State, it was reported that recently, more than 200 hundred villagers were killed by Fulani herdsmen in an orgy of violence that

lasted for three days. Some of the worst hit communities are Dansadau and Yargaladima villages in Dansadau Emirate of Maru local government area (Nte, 2016). Jigawa State is not an exception, more than 70 cases of conflicts have been recorded since the beginning of 2015 farming season. These cases bordered on encroachments into farms by cattle and farmers misuse of cattle routes (Ezeonwuka & Igwe, 2016, p. 208). The story is not different in Kaduna State. It was reported that gunmen suspected to be Fulani herdsmen on killed about 123 people in seven villages in Sanga Local Government Area in Kaduna State on June 2014. Earlier, the Fulani herdsmen had killed 38 people in Kabamu and Ankpong villages (Shiklam, 2014).

The eastern Nigeria is not free from the menace of Fulani herdsmen. There is hardly any community where Fulani herdsmen are not found. The activities of these herdsmen in some parts of Abia State have become worrisome. This is because, the cattle belonging to these herdsmen have inflicted huge damage on crops and farmlands. There have been reports of clashes between the herdsmen and farmers across the state. For instance, Abia communities of Uzuakoli in Bende Local Government Area, Ebem and Akanu in Ohafia and Umuchieze in Umunneochi, there have been cases of deadly clashes between rural farmers and these cattle breeders (Nwaopara & Okoli, 2015).

The menace of Fulani herdsmen in Enugu State has assumed a dangerous dimension. For example, in Ezeagu Local Government Area of the State consisting of more than forty communities, the aggressions of Fulani herdsmen have retarded agricultural and economic activities. The herdsmen are equipped with sophisticated weapons and government is not making any serious efforts to address the problem. People no longer go to farm nor sleep well at night for fear of aggressive attacks in Ezeagu community by the herdsmen (Ozubu cited in Nte, 2016). Recently, a seminarian was killed and three Roman Catholic priests were injured by the Fulani herdsmen in Enugu state. The situation is very disturbing.

In Anambra State, 4 people lost their lives in Ayamelum and Awka North local government areas and farmlands destroyed due to violent activities of Fulani herdsmen (Ezeonwuka & Igwe, 2016, p. 209). Farmers and villagers in Imo State have gory tales to tell. Emotions ran high and tension was electric recently as scores of angry youths of Irete community in the state blocked the ever-busy Owerri – Onitsha dual carriageway to protest the damnable activities of Fulani herdsmen in their community (Nwopara & Okoli, 2015). In Ebonyi State, people are not comfortable with the activities of Fulani herdsmen who tend to become very violent at “slightest provocation”. The women came out in the streets of Ishiagu recently protesting against destruction of their crops by the Fulani herdsmen. In Rivers State, the menace of Fulani herdsmen could have resulted in serious communal conflict in Obimma community of Ikwere Local Government Area. The situation was saved by the quick intervention of the state government. The Fulani herdsmen were harassing farmers and their cattle destroying crops in Obimma community, which was not taken lightly by the host community. The prompt intervention of the governor prevented what could have been a full blown communal conflict.

The Western part of the country is also not free of notorious activities of the

Fulani herdsmen. In Ojo Adam area of Ogun State rampaging Fulani herdsmen killed a farmer and injured many others. The issue came to a crescendo with the recent kidnapping of chief Olufalae, the former Secretary to the Government of the Federation, by Fulani herdsmen with whom he has been engaged in running battles, in his farm for past three years (Ezeonwuka & Igwe, 2016). The violent activities of Fulani herdsmen in Ekiti State has made the State Governor to sign into law a bill regulating the activities of these herdsmen in the state.

Effects of the Menace of Fulani Herdsmen for National Security in Nigeria

The violent activities of Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria are a serious threat to national security, which has adversely affected socio-economic progress of the country.

Firstly, the menace of Fulani herdsmen militates against human security. Human security is protection of people from all forms of socio-existential threats and vulnerabilities (Ayokhai, 2013). The perennial feud between the Fulani herdsmen and host communities in Nigeria has led to massive loss of lives and property, population displacements, human injury and livelihood crisis. These conflicts have crippled law and order in affected communities of different states in Nigeria such as Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, Taraba, Kaduna, Adamawa, Zamfara, Oyo, Imo, Cross River and Enugu, Rivers and Abia.

Secondly, crisis between Fulani herdsmen and farmers is an impediment to food security with mass displacement of farmers from the affected communities. It has drastically reduced agricultural production. This has been amply demonstrated by relative shortage of farm produce in the rural and urban markets of central Nigeria (Chukwuma, 2016). This could also be judged by the soaring prices of essential commodities in these areas.

Thirdly, the conflicts have led to strained relationship between the herdsmen and the farmers. The pastoralists regard settled farmers as their potential enemies that threaten their survival and destiny. On the other hand, the farmers regard the herdsmen as intruders in their communities who are bent to destroy their farm products. This creates an atmosphere of mutual distrust and animosity which threatens peaceful coexistence in these communities.

Finally, the violent clashes between the farmers and herdsmen have resulted in massive unemployment. For example, in North Central Nigeria, many farmers have not planted or harvested because of the menace of Fulani herdsmen. Many have abandoned their farming activities which are their means of livelihood and relocated to other places.

Conclusion and Recommendations

We have examined the menace of Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria and determine its implication for national security. The violent activities of Fulani herdsmen have led to destruction of lives and properties, displacement of farmers from their homes, decline in agricultural production and output, massive unemployment and results in strained relationship between the herdsmen and host communities. All these problems

pose serious threat to national security in Nigeria. The following recommendations would help to reduce the incidence of herdsmen attacks in Nigeria.

1. Since the majority of these herdsmen are illiterate trekking with animals for thousands of kilometers, it is imperative for the government provide basic education and better employment opportunities. This will enable them to be less violent.
2. The wealthy owners of these cattles should set up cattle ranches in different parts of the country where these animals should be cared for.
3. The established cattle ranches should be under close monitoring by the security forces in the state government or local government where they are located so that they cannot create problems for the host communities.
4. The Fulani herdsmen operating in any local government should be registered. This will enable the host communities to know the number of the cattles and the herdsmen and the locations where they are operating.
5. All the Fulani herdsmen using sophisticated weapons should be disarmed. The present situation where these herdsmen are using modern weapons like AK-47 to protect their cattle is unacceptable.
6. The state governments should make laws in their respective states regulating the activities of the Fulani herdsmen. The Ekiti state Government has taken a lead on this regard.
7. Finally, the security agencies should pay more attention to the operations of these pastoralists. At present, it seems that they under-estimating their capabilities.

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